

CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

Edited by
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DENMARK

150,000 Copies of "Answers to Jehova's Witnesses".

A small pamphlet called "Answers to Jehova's Witnesses" was published recently in no less than 150,000 copies. It is framed as a personal answer to a "witness" calling for purposes of propagation and, although kept in friendly terms, it very clearly deals with a number of points at which the propaganda of "Jehova's Witnesses" is false.

The idea for such a pamphlet is originally Canadian and has reached this country by way of the Anglican weekly "The Church Times". In Denmark the idea was taken up by a committee including, among others, Bishop H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, Copenhagen, and Rev. G. Sparring-Petersen, Rural Dean, and the pamphlet has been distributed for the most part by enclosing it in the parish papers in Copenhagen and a number of provincial towns.

There are app. 10,000 "Jehova's Witnesses" in Denmark who during the last few years have been very energetic in their canvassing.

Donations for Charity to be Tax-Free?

In the Bill for a new Assessment Act the Danish Minister of Finance proposes that donations amounting to from 200 to 1,000 Danish Crowns towards charity may in future be exempted from taxation, provided each donation amounts to at least 50 Danish Crowns. The Minister will make a list of all the charitable institutions entitled to receive tax-free contributions and a number of religious institutions are expected to be included in the list. As the proposal has been well received not only by the Government Parties, but also by the Opposition it may be expected to be carried.

Exempted from taxation already now are donations for charitable purposes amounting to either a fixed annual contribution for life or a fixed percentage of the annual income for a period of ten years.

More Civil Marriages Than Church Weddings in Greater Copenhagen.

Recently published statistics for 1958 show that in the metropolitan area there were 5,100 civil marriages as against only 4,700 church weddings.

1,226 children or 7.1 % of all children born were named and registered, but not baptized, and 900 dead or 7 % of all deceased were interred without the services of a clergyman. 754 people resigned from the Lutheran National Church.

In Greater Copenhagen and suburbs there were 161 churches and church halls and 328 clergymen. Of these, 108 churches and 245 clergymen belonged to the parishes in Copenhagen, Frederiksberg, and Gentofte, and 53 churches and 83 clergymen to parishes in the suburbs. In Greater Copenhagen there is one church for every 8,600 inhabitants and, the churches having altogether 53,600 seats, one seat for every 17 people, and one clergyman for every 3,800 inhabitants. In the suburbs there is one church for every 7,300 inhabitants, a seat for every 33 persons, and one clergyman for every 4,700 inhabitants.

Danish Comment on the Letter from Bishop Dibelius.

In a leading article the "Kristeligt Dagblad" in Copenhagen dissociates itself from the views expressed by Bishop Dibelius in a letter to Bishop Lilje. As may be remembered, Bishop Dibelius in his letter declared that the East German Government cannot be considered a true authority as it does not represent a constitutional State and that Christians, in consequence, are not bound to show obedience to it. The "Kristeligt Dagblad" writes:

"We only need to think of our own situation during the German occupation in order to realize how difficult it can be to know where Christians should obey those in power. But the situation in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik is actually quite different. The Pankow Government is lawful authority. It must be right to state clearly that the Christians do owe allegiance to it, except in matters where conscience demands something else. It must be noted with approval that even a man with such declared "Western" sympathies as Bishop Lilje is of the same opinion.

We have not the slightest inclination to criticize Bishop Dibelius. He is a truly great man who deserves the deepest respect for his faithful and efficient service for many years now in the most exposed office of the German Church. To praise his eminent qualities comes far more natural to us than to criticize him.

Let us therefore be content to say that it is quite incomprehensible to us, and rather sad, that this particular man should be the author of such a letter. Everybody knows that Dibelius has strong "Western" leanings. Everybody knows that he has had plenty of opportunities to observe the injustices committed by the East German authorities. But as far as we can see, all this does not justify the fatal letter."

News in Brief:

- On the suggestion of Bishop Frode Beyer, Haderslev, all the parish papers in the 51 parishes in the Diocese will be centralized in such a way that two pages of the paper will be edited locally and the rest contain common reading matter. This arrangement should make it possible to improve the finances and to obtain a better display and quality of reading matter.

- Bishop Th. Suhr of the Roman Catholic Church and a group of pilgrims were received in audience by the Pope in connection with the often repeated appeal for the canonization of the Danish scientist Niels Stensen (1638-1686). If the appeal should really be granted, he will become the fifth Danish saint and the first one since the Middle Ages.

- Professor of Church History, Mr. J. Oskar Andersen, has died in Copenhagen, 94 years old. He has bequeathed his fortune of about 500,000 Danish Crowns to researches in church history.

FINLAND

54 Million Finnish Marks Collected in the Course of 10 Years.

Since its foundation ten years ago the national church fund "Common Responsibility" has collected altogether 754 million Finnish marks. This year the sum amounted to 60 million Marks which must be considered satisfactory in as much as another collection, on the occasion of the centenary of the Finnish Missionary Society, took place at the same time.

During the years the President of Finland and his wife have been patrons of the fund. The ten years' anniversary was celebrated by a function in the church of Töölö at which Bishop Eino Sormunen, among others, gave a speech.

There have been some 300,000 contributors annually and about 5,000 volunteers have acted as collectors all over the country.

Tibet and Finland.

Both the Finnish Social-Democratic and the non-Socialist Press have generally deplored that Finland abstained from voting when the United Nations had to decide on a possible debate on the Tibetan question. Thus the "Borgåbladet" for instance, writes:

"Once Finland was in the same position as Tibet is now when she was attacked by a great power. Almost 20 years ago we appealed to the League of Nations for help and moral support. At that time the aggressor was branded by a united Assembly. Therefore it is a bitter experience to learn that our nation to-day feels forced to abstain from voting in a matter concerning the fate of a small freedom-loving country in a hard world."

Two Episcopal Enthronizations.

This month Archbishop Ilmari Salomies enthroned both the two new bishops. On Sunday, November 8th, Bishop Martti Simojoki, Bishop of the new Diocese of Helsinki (Helsingfors) was enthroned and on the following Sunday the new Bishop of the Diocese of Mikkeli (St. Michel), Bishop Simo Alaja. Both ceremonies were attended by the President of the Republic, Mr. Urho Kekkonen, and the Archbishop was assisted by bishops in the Finnish as well as the Swedish and Danish sister churches.

New Untraditional Church to be Erected.

With the recommendation of the local church authorities the drawings for a new untraditional church have been submitted to the Government authorities for approval. The church in question is to be built at Rivesi and the architects are Mr. and Mrs. Heikki Sirén who are also responsible for the drawings for the ultramodern "technologist church" at Otaniemi.

The drawings have been widely discussed by the public.

Should the Altar be Moved down in the Church?

In his inaugural lecture last month the newly appointed Professor of Practical Theology at the Åbo Academy (Turku), Dr. Helge Nyman, dealt with the often discussed subject of "The Theology of the Interior of a Church". The Professor raised the question whether the interior furnishing of a church must necessarily conform with a traditionally accepted pattern which modern architecture has not been able to break down. In this connection he mentioned the discovery of the archaeologists that the altar in the ancient churches was a table in the middle

of the building around which the Lord's Supper was celebrated in common. Only when the Lord's Supper began to be regarded as a Sacrifice was the altar moved up to the eastern wall of the church and away from the congregation. Luther's breach with the Roman Church might have led to a reformation of the interior furnishings of the churches, but Luther showed caution and introduced only minor changes.

"A general re-arrangement of the interior of the churches aiming at a return to the principles of the ancient church may renew the interest", Professor Nyman said and pointed out that in the Northern countries to-day the Roman Church is less hampered by tradition than the Lutheran churches. In some Roman Catholic churches there are actually unattached altars in the middle of the church.

Many New Parishes in Helsinki (Helsingfors).

As proposed by the Church authorities in Helsinki (Helsingfors) a number of parishes in the ever-growing residential quarters will be divided as from January 1st, 1961. The re-arrangement of the parishes will entail the establishment of several new congregations.

Sermon by Archbishop Attracts Wide Attention.

On the occasion of the 150 years' anniversary last month of the Cabinet Council Archbishop Ilmari Salomies delivered a sermon which has caused a spirited discussion in the Press. In his sermon the Archbishop expressed his deep concern about the crumbling respect for the legal system and the sanctity of the Law. He stressed the moral obligations of the leaders of the nation and cautioned them to be on guard lest an inner state of decay should lead to the undermining of society.

The Agrarian Government paper, the "Maakansa", strongly opposed the admonition, maintaining that the Archbishop had no cause for his statements, while other newspapers described the Archbishop's words as a wholesome and necessary warning. With reference to the discussion the Swedish weekly, the "Församlingsbladet", noted that evidently the Church is still able to make itself heard and to act as the conscience of the people.

News in Brief:

- The Finnish Missionary Society has decided to begin work in a new field, West Pakistan, in co-operation with the Danish Mission to the Pathans. For the time being one man and one or two women missionaries will be sent out.
- On November 15th a collection was taken in all Finnish congregations for the relief work of the World Council of Churches among refugees.
- As a contribution to the World Refugee Year the Y.W.C.A. in Finland has decided to support refugees in Algiers.
- Dr. Seppo A. Teinonen has been appointed Senior Lecturer in Missions and Ecumenism at the University of Helsinki (Helsingfors). So far there has been no lecturership in Ecumenism at the University.
- The Lutheran National Committee in Finland has donated 5,000 German Marks towards a stained-glass window in the Church of the Reformation at Worms in West Germany. Bishop Martti Simojoki took part in the rededication service on October 30th.

ICELAND

cessor at the University of Bishop Einarsson.

The Chair of Systematic and Practical Theology at the University Reykjavik which became vacant on the appointment of Professor Sigurðrn Einarsson to the See of Iceland has now been filled by Rev. Johann Inneson, Rector of Thingvellir. The new Professor has studied at a number of foreign universities and, following upon a number of years as missionary in China, he has also held a Chair at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Chungking.

NORWAY

ew "Institute for Ecumenical Contacts" Established.

At a meeting in Oslo at the end of October a group of private people set up a new "Institute for Ecumenical Contacts" for a trial period of two years. Rev. Peder Borgen, D.D., was elected President. The members of the temporary Board belong to both the Lutheran National Church and the Free Churches. The new Institute will supply all-round information about the ecumenical movement and everything of interest in church life in other countries and continents. The plan is to build up a team of people who will keep newspapers and periodicals informed of ecumenical events. Moreover, the Institute will make international studies of "The Church and Social Responsibility", "The Churches and the Underdeveloped Countries", "The Position and Tasks of Laymen in the Life of the Church" and similar topics available to the public through translations and in other ways. Endeavours will be made to establish a wider representation at ecumenical courses and conferences in foreign countries and for a more active Norwegian contribution to ecumenical studies. A special effort will be made to increase the interest for ecumenical matters in youth organizations, and plans are being drawn up for a special Norwegian conference to follow upon the international youth conference at Lausanne next year.

In an article in the "Vårt Land" the President of the Institute emphasizes that there is no intention of butting in on the activities of already existing organizations, but of acting as a further supplement to these.

At an inaugural meeting several of those present expressed their doubts about the project, fearing, among other things, that it might weaken the possibilities for an organizational contact between the Lutheran National Church and the Free Churches. In answer to this one of the members of the new Board said that it was the hope of the Institute to pave the way for a more official discourse among the various religious congregations.

The "Norwegian Inter-Church Institute", under the leadership of Rev. Henrik Hauge, is the contacting organ between the Lutheran National Church and the Churches in other countries, especially the Lutheran churches, but there is no official joint organization for the different denominations in Norway, although the "Ekumenisk Krets" serves as an unofficial ecumenical forum.

Christian Women Oppose "Grounds of Eugenics".

1,000 Norwegian women and men have signed a declaration by which they undertake the moral and economic responsibility for children born with hereditary taints. In this way they hope to prevent the inclusion in the new Abortion Act, shortly to be read in Parliament, of a provision

for legally induced abortion on "grounds of eugenics". The Bill contains such a provision.

Heading the campaign is a woman physician, Dr. Klara Ekre Leivestad, who has organized the women in a "Norwegian Women's National Union for the Protection of Mother and Child". The public appeal for support says that legal abortion on grounds of eugenics is unworthy of a civilized and Christian nation, not without danger to the mother, and altogether objectionable from the point of view that "life is sacred from the moment of conception and must never be destroyed if a woman is able to give birth to a child without mortal danger to herself".

The signatories to the declaration pledge themselves to take over every responsibility for such hereditary tainted children whom the parents do not wish to keep themselves, by placing the children either in the care of good foster-parents or in special children's homes.

The campaign has attracted much attention and is described by the Christian daily paper "Vårt Land" as an unequivocal and indisputable challenge to Parliament, while the "Dagbladet", which is critical of the Church, tries to brush away the campaign as a piece of bluff by alleging that the signatures do not in any way place their owners under any obligations whatever.

Women Organizations Want Women Pastors.

In a resolution the Norwegian Women's National Council, consisting of a number of women organizations, have requested the Bishops in the Lutheran National Church and the Minister of Church Affairs and Education to take such steps as to make it possible for women divinity graduates to obtain livings and steps as to make it possible for women divinity graduates to obtain livings and take Holy Orders in the Lutheran National Church without any restrictions whatever.

From a purely legal point of view women theologians are entitled to take orders in Norway, but so far no woman has asked to be ordained as this would presuppose a nomination to a living by a parish council and the assent of a Bishop to perform the ordination.

The Christian daily paper "Vårt Land" opposes the request by the National Council, but appeals to the Church authorities to present, at the earliest possible moment, definite proposals for the establishment in the Church of a special "diaconate" for women which should be properly regulated, properly paid, and endowed with sufficient independence and authority. Such a proposal may possibly be introduced at the Diocesan Councils' joint meeting in Oslo this month.

Ecumenical Retreat Home at Lom.

An independent ecumenical group of people "Discipelkretsen", most of whom belong to the Norwegian Mission Covenant Church, have opened a retreat home at Lom. The idea is to establish a so-called "community" of 3 or 4 sisters who will make it their lifework to run the home and will live in poverty and joint ownership. No vows are made and members of the Community may leave it at any time, but for practical reasons they must agree to be unmarried as long as they live at the home.

Moving spirit of the enterprise is Rev. Sigmur Kostøl, who, in an interview in the "Vårt Land" says that Holy Communion is celebrated every morning at Lom, but even so he does not feel that the movement can be considered Sacramental. The group also meets for prayers, scripture readings, meditations, confessions, and talks about spiritual matters.

This year there have been 39 guests, staying for altogether 100 nights, but the home is now being extended.

Foreign Missions a Function of the Church?

In a recent address Dr. O.G. Myklebust, Senior Lecturer, Oslo, said that "foreign missions" should no longer be a separate and special undertaking, but must become a function of "the whole church".

In Norway foreign missions are supported exclusively by voluntary societies and the Christian daily in Bergen "Dagen" feels that this state of affairs is to be preferred. The paper writes:

"As far as we are concerned we have never been able to grasp why 'the whole church' should become appreciably more active in this matter if the bishops, for instance, or some other national church organ were to be in charge of foreign missions. Quite on the contrary, it would most likely result in the church on the whole becoming less involved. For the whole church can only become really concerned if all its members become deeply engaged in the matter, and we cannot see that a national church office should be able to achieve the same results in this direction as our present private societies have done."

Bishop Fjellbu Goes on Visitation by Air.

Bishop Arne Fjellbu, Trondheim, who is 69 years of age, recently went on his first visitation by air. The Bishop visited the military air base on the island of Ørland. The full strength of the base marched to church where the Bishop preached, and in the evening he attended a social gathering in the Officers' Mess.

SWEDEN

The Church to Lose its Veto?

A clear majority of the Constitutional Committee, set up by the Swedish Government, will introduce a Bill to the effect that the voice of the Church in matters relating to ecclesiastical legislation should be abolished so that in the future laws dealing with the affairs of the Lutheran National Church should be decided by Parliament alone. So far the Church Assembly has had a right of veto in as much as all Bills concerning internal Church affairs must be passed by the Church Assembly as well as by Government and Parliament.

This news in the Swedish Press has caused wide attention and called forth a unanimous protest in church papers. Thus, the Clergymen's Association organ, the "Svensk Kyrkotidning" writes that an abolition of the veto of the Church Assembly would constitute a step in the direction of abolishing the Church Assembly itself. The weekly paper "Vår Kyrka" claims that all legislation dealing with the faith, confession and services of the Church must continue to be decided by the Church's own organs. The "Svensk Pastoraltidskrift", published by the Confessional Front, describes the Bill as "a giant stride towards an absolute State Church" in which the freedom of the Church would be largely fictitious. Several papers quote a statement by Archbishop Gunnar Hultgren in a book two years ago in which it says: "An increased dependence on the State would be of such fatal consequences that it must outweigh all the drawbacks connected with a separation between State and Church."

An official report on the matter by the Constitutional Committee will probably not be available until 1961.

Churches Not to be Open for Non-Christian Purposes.

The Bill introduced by the Government Department of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs concerning an amendment to the rules about the opening of churches for other purposes" has had an extremely cold reception by most of the 23 instances which have been asked to express their opinion about it. The amendment proposed that in the future the local church council and not the minister, as hitherto, should decide in the individual cases. Referring to the shortage of adequate accommodation the Bill further proposed that the present possibilities for using the buildings of the Lutheran National Church for non-religious gatherings should be extended to include also, for instance, lectures, concerts and association meetings.

Almost all Church authorities consulted are opposed to the Bill. Thus 12 of the 13 Cathedral Chapters maintain that the minister must have the final say, one of them explaining its standpoint by pointing out that people may be elected for the church councils without being either baptized or confirmed. Several answers express the fear that such an amendment might lead to a profanation of the church, and from many quarters it is emphasized that never before have so many meeting places been available in the various parishes so that there is no need for opening the churches for secular purposes.

The organ of the Confessional Front calls the Bill "one of the most serious blows" ever directed against the independence of the church. "If the Minister of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs does not drop the matter he must be met by a firm and bold no from the Church", the paper writes.

Women Pastors in Sweden by Next Year?

At the Swedish Bishops' Conference in January next year the question of women pastors is bound to come up once more for discussion. Several of the Swedish Bishops are said to be willing to ordain women, but so far no woman theologian has applied for ordination. However, this is now expected soon and the matter will be discussed at the Bishops' Conference in January. Among the women divinity graduates who, according to the Press, intend to ask for ordination is Dr. Margit Sahlin, member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

Swedish Foreign Missions in 1958.

According to recently published statistics, compiled on the recommendation of the Swedish Missionary Council, there were 1,585 missionaries working in Swedish mission fields in 1958 and almost 20 million Swedish Crowns were collected for this work. Out of the 1,585 missionaries 451 were sent out by the Pentecostal Movement, 257 by the Swedish Mission Covenant Church, and 239 by the Swedish Church Mission. As to contributions towards foreign missions the Swedish Church Mission leads with 5.4 million Swedish Crowns, next comes the Mission Covenant Church with 3.3 million Crowns, and then the Pentecostal Movement with 2.9 million Crowns.

Increased Church Attendance in Sweden.

Based on the official reports in later years from the Bishops the Home Mission Board of the Church of Sweden has compiled statistics showing an increase in church attendance as well as in other spheres of church life. App. 250,000 people take part in the service on Sunday morning, equalling 3.26 % of the population, and if attendance at other church services were included, the figure would increase considerably. The Diocese of Stockholm is last on the list with 1.1 % and the

Churches Not to be Open for Non-Religious Purposes

The Bill introduced by the Government Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs concerning an amendment to the Church Act of 1952 opening of churches for other purposes. The Bill had its origin in a suggestion by most of the 25 instances which have been referred to express their opinion about it. The amendment proposed that in the future the local church council and not the minister, as hitherto, should decide in the individual cases. Referring to the shortage of adequate accommodation the Bill further proposed that the present possibilities of using the buildings of the Lutheran National Church for non-religious purposes should be extended to include also, for instance, lectures, concerts and association meetings.

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Swedish Foreign Missions in 1958

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Increased Church Attendance in Sweden

Based on the official statistics for 1958, the Church of Sweden has compiled statistics showing an increase in church attendance as well as in other spheres. At church last Aug. 250,000 people took part in the service on Sunday morning, an increase of 26% on the figures for the corresponding year. Other church services were included in the figures which indicate a considerable increase in church attendance in 1958 on the list with 1.1% and the

Diocese of Skara at the top with 5,1 %/o. The Dioceses of Härnösand, Västerås and Skara are interesting because it is possible here to compare figures of six years ago with the present ones, and everywhere an increase in church attendance may be noted; in Skara, for instance, the increase amounts to 0,7 %/o. It is a characteristic feature that the smaller the parishes are, the higher the figures - and vice versa.

Moreover, the statistics show that 86 %/o of all children born are baptized in the Swedish Lutheran National Church, and 86 %/o of all young people are confirmed. Here, too, the figures have gone up. 91,4 %/o of all marriages take place in the Lutheran National Church, 7,1 %/o before the registrar, and 1,5 %/o in Free Churches. Of all funerals 96,6 %/o are conducted by clergymen in the Lutheran National Church, 3,3 %/o by Free Church ministers and only 0,1 %/o without any religious assistance.

Since January 1st, 1952, when the Act about Religious Freedom came into force, only 26,369 people, or 1,42 %/o of the population, have availed themselves of their right to withdraw from the Lutheran National Church. It is pointed out, however, that there is no material from one of the Dioceses and that the figures are not quite recent so that the percentage probably is a little higher.

More than 10 million Swedish Crowns are collected annually in the churches, a figure which also shows a marked increase.

Day of Work" Celebrated in Åsunda.

Acting on a suggestion by the Home Mission Board of the Church of Sweden a "Day of Work" was celebrated last month at Åsunda, a typical country parish. Archbishop Gunnar Hultgren preached in the church, which was filled to capacity, and at a meeting afterwards prominent representatives of the Trade Unions and the farmers' professional organizations, among others, addressed the audience. The "Day" helped to strengthen the contact between the Church and members of the professional organizations, and similar arrangements are now being planned for next year in other parts of the country. The collections in church were divided equally between the foreign mission work of the Church and the Trade Union relief campaign for underdeveloped countries.

Ecumenical Study Group Says Yes to Atomic Weapons.

Six of the seven members of a study group arranged by the Swedish Ecumenical Committee on International Affairs say yes to atomic weapons in the defence forces while one member, Dr. Ansgar Eeg-Olofsson adopts an out-and-out pacifistic attitude.

The findings of the group have been published in a small book called "Kärnvapen?" (Nuclear Weapons?). All seven members are agreed that, from an ethical point of view, there is no difference between traditional and nuclear weapons, but the majority feels that under certain conditions the means of resorting to force of arms must be tolerated, even after the invention of nuclear weapons, especially in regard to the importance of balancing the threats of terror, while Dr. Eeg-Olofsson feels that the new weapons have rendered the employment of war as a means to achieve a goal indefensible, however idealistic the goal might be.

News in Brief:

- As a result of the earnest representations on the part of Bishop Askmark, the Rev. Ebbe Arvidsson who wanted to resign as the general secretary for the Youth Movement on the Home Mission Board of the Church of Sweden as a protest against the appointment of Rev. Ingmar Ström as Director (see CN No. 50) has agreed to remain.

